

Myth #71: Who's on First? Nevada's First Newspaper by Guy Rocha, Former Nevada State Archivist

The masthead on Lucius Beebe and Charles Clegg's inaugural version of the *Territorial Enterprise* on May 2, 1952 claimed the famous publication was "Nevada's First Newspaper." When they resurrected the newspaper, the two colorful bon vivants and raconteurs probably believed it to be true. After all, Myron Angel's *History of Nevada* (1881) claimed the newspaper was "the pioneer paper of the Territory." Everyone seemingly wants a first and so did Beebe and Clegg in their efforts to hype Virginia City and the Comstock in the 1950s. However it's not true. Let me tell you why.

The first edition of the *Territorial Enterprise* was printed in Genoa, Utah Territory, on December 18, 1858. The pioneer newspaper and its printing press then moved to Carson City where it first appeared on November 26, 1859. One year later the *Enterprise* found a permanent home in Virginia City, Utah Territory, where the paper resumed publication on November 3, 1860.



By late 1862, the fledgling newspaper, now published in Nevada Territory, included among its reporters William Wright and Samuel Clemens. The editor was Joseph Goodman who had hired both gifted writers. Wright had adopted the pen name "Dan DeQuille" in California prior to his coming to the Comstock in 1860. Clemens took the pen name "Mark Twain" in January 1863 while working for the *Enterprise*.

The key element in this story is that the *Territorial Enterprise* was the first newspaper to be PRINTED in the area that became Nevada. We now know there were two handwritten newspapers that preceded the *Enterprise*.

Nevada's first newspaper was actually the *Gold-Canon Switch* produced about 1854 in the fledgling mining camp of Johntown. Walter Cosser, who first arrived at Spofford Hall's Station at the mouth of Gold Canyon in 1852, is credited with founding the Johntown settlement in late 1853 when he opened a store a few miles up the canyon. Precious little is known of the *Gold-Canon Switch*. Dan DeQuille, in *The Big Bonanza* (1876), characterized the newspaper as a "spicy weekly" composed of "several sheets" of foolscap and "assiduously passed from hand to hand." The editor was Joseph Webb who was among the first to locate claims on the Comstock in 1859. No issues of the paper are known to exist.



The second hand-written newspaper, the *Scorpion*, dates to about February 1, 1857 when Stephen A. Kinsey issued the first number at Genoa. Kinsey was among the all-male party under John Reese's leadership that permanently established Mormon Station in June 1851. Bearing the motto, "Fear no man, and do justice to all," the paper was published monthly, according to Richard Lingenfelter and Karen Gash in *Newspapers of Nevada* (1984), "and contained twelve columns of interesting news items, written in a large bold hand and generously

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illustrated with amusing caricatures." Lingenfelter and Gash speculate that the hand-written paper probably didn't last a year. No known copies exist of the *Scorpion*, however there is a reference to the July 1, 1857 issue in the Territorial Enterprise of April 12, 1871.

So the next time you read or hear that the *Territorial Enterprise* was Nevada's first newspaper you will know better.

Photo of Historic Marker: Courtesy of Karen Grillo

Photo of Stephen Kinsey: Courtesy *First Impressions: The Trail Through Carson Valley* (2001) by Robert W. Ellison

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